

Christian Impacts *in Iraq and Syria*

Pam -
Near East - 1862
Iraq

Nicol

Mosul.
Minaret
of the
Grand Mosque.

THE SYRIA MISSION IN 1931

BY JAMES H. NICOL

[*Mr. Nicol is secretary of the Syria Mission.*]

THE Syria Mission of the Presbyterian Church has the distinction of operating in more countries than any other Mission of the Church. It serves three distinct states, each with its own government, postal and fiscal systems.

The first of these states is the Republic of Lebanon, including the great Lebanon range so full of Biblical lore, together with the interior and coastal plains; its greater cities are Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon and Zahleh, all occupied by the Mission.

Then there is the State of the Alaouites, named for the tribes inhabiting the northwestern mountain range. Its chief city and capital is Latakia, on the coast north of Tripoli, but in this state the Syria Mission works only in certain villages in the interior behind the mountain range.

The largest state of the French mandatory group is Syria, with its capital at Damascus, and with its large cities of Homs, Hama, Aleppo and Deir-ez-Zore, all of them except the capital occupied by our Mission. Only two sections of the territory of French mandate are left entirely to other missions, the Reformed bodies of America and Ireland working in the northwest, and the British and French Missions in the southeast, including the Djebel Druze.

The people in all these states are Syrians, reenforced in recent years by many Armenians driven out of Turkey. The population is divided by religious lines, all relationships, including political representation, being based on religion. The main cleavage is between Christian and non-Christian. On the Christian side all Oriental sects are represented, both those related to the Ancient Eastern Church, and those acknowledging the supremacy of the Pope at Rome. On the non-Christian side, there is first the great Moslem division between Orthodox Sunnis and Shiites, the former being greatly in the majority. The mission works with both. Then there are the Druze of the Mount Lebanon field, the Jews of the cities, the Nusairiyeh of the Alaouite State, a few Bahais, and, in the far north, the Yezidis or devil worshippers.

The Moslems represent 75 per cent of the population and are in all stages of development, more cultured and sophisticated in the cities, simple in the villages, primitive nomads called Bedouin in the interior desert.

These religious divisions run through all social and political life, and condition education, civil rights, personal and family laws of marriage, divorce and inheritance. The various religious groups conduct their own courts for these social relationships, and the judgments of these courts are recognized by the government.



Where the Syria Mission began a century ago. Now Jessup Hall of the American School for Girls, Beirut.

It will be seen at once that the mission faces a most complicated situation, entirely different in its problems from one where the issue is only between Christianity and heathenism.

In these states the Presbyterian Church has today forty-four active missionaries, with six others honorably retired residing in the country. These retired missionaries seem to be quite as active as their officially active associates, and are a great blessing to all. With the foreign workers is associated a staff of 275 Syrians and special term missionaries, made up of pastors, preachers, teachers, colporteurs, book store keepers, evangelistic workers, nurses and those engaged in publication work.

The Ministry of the Church

The organized evangelistic work is carried on by the Native Church, fully established with three presbyteries and a synod. The presbyteries in recent years have been carrying on their own work and administering their funds with only the advice of the missionary when sought.

In the city of Beirut a large self-supporting congregation with its own pastor conducts work in various sections of the city. This past year there were three Druzes in the pastor's instruction class, and a third of the morning congregation is made up of non-members of the church, who come as seekers after truth.

The pastors and preachers in the out-stations send in to the Presbytery monthly reports showing how many villages they have visited outside of their own immediate field, many of them repeatedly getting an entrance into Moslem

and Nusairiyeh villages. In the northern fields the Pentecostal year was emphasized, resulting in the largest enrolment of new church members in the history of the field.

The church is showing renewed signs of becoming a "witnessing" church. Gradually it overcomes its age-long fear and dislike of Moslems and begins to yearn for opportunities to lead them to Christ.

The mission is using more and more the book store and reading room as a method of approach. The Moslems like to come into these places to read both secular and religious literature. In this way opportunities occur for natural conversation about religious and moral themes. These reading rooms now exist at Nebatiyeh, a Shiite town in the south; Zahleh, a large Catholic-Moslem town to the east; Tripoli, Beirut and Aleppo, to mention only a partial list. In Aleppo, a new one was opened the past year in the very center of the Moslem market, and gives the missionary a center from which to work.

Speaking of Aleppo, a crying need in that great Islamic city is for a church to be the spiritual center of evangelical faith, and the home of evangelistic testimony. The little congregation has done wonders in gathering funds for this purpose, and if they could have some help toward a site, could probably soon realize their goal. An ideal site for this lighthouse awaits the means with which to purchase.

The Ministry of the School

The Junior College for Women

Several years ago the mission responded to the growing need for higher education for women. Up to very recent years the high school was thought to be the final goal for aspiring girls. But new vistas began to open before the eyes of the women of Syria; there was evident for them a larger freedom of choice; some even began with bated breath to mention professions, as possibilities for women as well as men. It was evident that very soon the demand must be met by some one, and why should they not make their entrance into higher education, surrounded with the best spiritual and moral influences?

A beginning was made in connection with the Girls' School in Beirut, and then the American Junior College for Women was established in its own rented quarters in the vicinity of the university. In its three years of a separate life the student body has doubled twice. Last year there was not an empty room available even in case of illness, and a nearby home was taken for the staff. This year a two-apartment house will be used for foreign staff and additional students. At the last commencement seventeen girls received diplomas, of whom four were Moslem girls and one a Druze. Ten of the seventeen will go on to higher professional study, and the rest will teach. Graduates are already teaching in Mesopotamia, Palestine and Egypt, as well as in Syria; two are technicians at the university; one is a Y. W. C. A. secretary.

Through the generous cooperation of the church at home, land has been purchased for a campus, a site beautifully situated overlooking the Mediterranean, and not far from the campus of the American University. It now remains



Learning to make their own clothes in Sidon Girls' School.

to place on this campus at least two buildings, so that the institution may not be hampered in its service to the women of the Near East at this critical time.

The Sidon Girls' School

The mission is also a pioneer in practical education for the girls of Syria. The Sidon Girls' School, after its noble spiritual service to two generations of Syrian girls, has now added to its program, practical training in Home Economics. The beautiful new plant, made possible by the gift from the Women's Jubilee Fund, afterwards supplemented with further gifts, is now a completed reality. This consists of a fine central administrative building, surrounded by four cottages, each housing two families of ten girls each, and an out-door gymnasium. The groups in the cottages live out a complete family experience, each family being responsible for its household and economic life. Each is in charge of a house-mother, and the responsibilities are divided in turn among the various members. Family life is graded on general attitudes, neatness, cleanliness, food preparation and economy.

The spiritual life is maintained both in family and in the general school life. A decision-day service in the spring, observed after careful preparation, led a number to assent to the following promise "I accept and trust Jesus Christ as my Saviour; I will follow him as my Lord and serve him as my Master."

The girls are already using their new knowledge in helpful ways, such as in health service in villages in the vicinity of Sidon. Recently the inspector of Moslem schools in Palestine applied for a teacher of home economics; another for a matron for a Moslem school; another for a dietician for a Y. W. C. A. camp.

The Mother of the Junior College

In the American School for Girls in Beirut 110 non-Christian girls lived and worked last year with 150 Christians of various sects in a happy school.

Two hundred girls in the higher school were crowded into a study room planned for 165, and there were nine classes for eight recitation rooms. This school is having a unique and valued opportunity to train numbers of Mesopotamian girls who are to lead in the educational life of that country. We think it a happy omen for that newly developing land, that some of its women leaders and educators have been given the spiritual view of life along with their intellectual preparation. From the little primary girls who describe lying and dishonesty as "pricking a thorn in Jesus' head," to the twenty-six members of the "Questers Society," whose purpose is to study Christ and how to follow him day by day, all the girls are continually in touch with the Christian spiritual view of life. A Moslem, a Druze, and a Bahai girl were members of the "Questers' group." Seven girls united with the church during the year.

Space fails to speak of the sister school in Tripoli, where 190 girls of the same kind had the same or similar training and experience. Seven of them were in training for church membership and six were received during the year. This school enjoyed its completed plant, also made possible by the Jubilee Fund with supplementary gifts.

Work for Vagrant Girls

Nor is the mission interested only in the normal girl, who can take advantage of such opportunities. Together with other workers of various nationalities, the missionaries recently heard the call of the poor victims in the houses of prostitution and the vagrant girls of Beirut. After careful investigation and after enlisting the sympathy of the police officials, a mission room was opened in the segregated district, where every night men are instructed and exhorted to live a clean and godly life. More than 100 men hear this message nightly, and many have been the testimonies of repentance and change of life. At the same time a house was found outside the city and opened as a Rescue Home for Girls. A trained matron is in charge, so that no longer can the police claim that they must send a vagrant girl to a house of prostitution because there is no other place for her to go. This work is supported by offerings from the missionary and native communities.

Thus with college, school and rescue home the mission tries to do its part to guide the women of the East into the new day so rapidly dawning.

Education for Boys

The mission has three major boys' schools in addition to the many village schools conducted jointly by the Presbyteries and the Mission.

The oldest of these schools is Gerard Institute in Sidon, celebrating this year its jubilee. Here considerable progress is being made in getting the industrial and agricultural work started. There is carpentry for all the pupils, auto mechanics for the highest class, garden plots and tree culture for selected pupils, cows and chickens for the self-help department.

The orphanage department was also re-opened with thirteen little Protestant boys. An attempt is being made to introduce these boys into the student body without the stigma of the name "orphan," so that they will not be handi-



Ferry landing at Deir-ez-Zore on the Euphrates River, newest outpost of the Syria Mission.

capped by the social attitudes of the other boys toward them. There were 207 boys in the Institute last year, 77 being non-Christians. Dr. and Mrs. George A. Ford added greatly to the land and equipment of the Institute, which is a monument to their consecrated enthusiasm and generosity.

Just up the coast from Beirut the Tripoli Boys' School has recently celebrated the twenty-fifth anniversary of its organization. This school is giving a preparatory school education to about 200 boys annually, 30 per cent of them non-Christian. The alumni association showed its love and loyalty last year by making an anniversary gift to be used in scholarships for needy boys.

Then farther north still, in the great city of Aleppo, the mission has its North Syria School for Boys. The church at home has recently provided it with a building, where each year sees a growing number of boys coming under the influence of Christian education. The school graduated its first class of five boys last year. Three of these are going into Christian work. The building is also equipped with a gymnasium and social rooms, where many young men of all sects gather for exercise, games and lectures. Recently a large tract of land on the edge of the city has been purchased, where in the future this work can fulfill its present promise in a boarding school serving all the Arabic communities of the north, the great majority of whom are Moslems.

So far only the large organized schools directly under care of the mission have been mentioned. That gives only a very partial view of what is being done for the children. To get the full picture one must go into village after village all over the land, where there are schools conducted in cooperation with the Evangelical Church. Some are very simple, others large and well-organized, all having their effective influence on the religious and moral life of their

communities, and selecting candidates for leadership who go on to higher schools. The mission is very grateful for its company of 3,500 school children, daily learning the best things that God has for his children.

The Ministry of Healing

Through its medical ministry the mission is having larger opportunities for Christian service and witness than ever before. This ministry is carried on at three points, each having its own peculiar methods and opportunities.

At this time the mission is particularly interested in its newest outpost on the Euphrates, at Deir-ez-Zore. Dr. Ellis H. Hudson and his little family have held this post alone for six years. Foundations have been laid for a great ministry both to the town people of this rapidly growing city, and to the thousands of Bedouin in the surrounding desert. The past two years have shown great developments in the material life of the people; a water system has taken the place of unsanitary water skins and dirty water. Now there is the possibility of a railroad through Deir-ez-Zore to the coast.

Up to the present the missionaries have lived and worked in an unsatisfactory house on the main street, in the midst of noise and dust. They have had no hospital facilities—nothing but an improvised clinic on the ground floor of the house. Recently the Board has acquired ten acres of land on the island, and there it is proposed to build residences and a hospital.

The lonely family has been reenforced by another family, Rev. and Mrs. S. Neale Alter, fresh from their experience with evangelistic work among Moslems in Hama. Then there is a nurse, Miss Clara Peter, and a woman doctor, Dr. Susan Crosley. When Mr. Alter went over to arrange for his family recently he could find no house available, and this family will be living in four rooms, one of them detached from the others, until a residence can be built on the new property.

As this is being written at the mission building in Beirut, there is the sound of hammers crating furniture and boxing supplies; porters are bringing loads of provisions from the city markets; there is a growing pile of crates and boxes marked "Deir-ez-Zore"; in two weeks these agents of the church will start their long trek to Deir-ez-Zore, there to minister to the needy and to preach the gospel by deed and word. Dr. Hudson writes this plea in his annual report: "We look to the church at home to set us free from the impediments that hold us back so that we can render the greatest possible service at the present time."

The mission is picturing this group of consecrated workers, fully furnished before many months have passed, with a hospital and equipment, and also with sanitary homes in which the children of the group may live happy and healthy lives. Soon our doctors in Deir-ez-Zore will be free from the necessity of condemning poor people to death because they are not able to pay for the long journey to Aleppo for an operation, but will be able to bring to the poorest the benefits of surgery, and with these benefits the healing of the soul.

The Kennedy Memorial Hospital

At the other end of the field, on the sea coast at Tripoli, stands the Kennedy Memorial Hospital. Here the work is in full swing. It begins at 6:20 every morning, with Dr. Boyes leading the whole staff in morning devotions, and prayer for the work of the day. It is not surprising that four of the staff confessed their faith in Christ last year. The clinic had 5,791 visitors, bringing the staff into contact with 1,850 new patients. The forty beds are fully occupied nearly all the time, and the X-ray and laboratory facilities are of service to local medical men.

Many improvements have been made this year, in preparation for the enlarged medical staff. Dr. and Mrs. R. K. Brown have joined the staff, which will insure not only increased services through hospital and clinic, but will make those services continuous in the future, without regard to furloughs and necessary vacations.

A beautiful service is rendered by Miss Barber who goes through the waiting rooms and wards, comforting and encouraging and speaking of the Great Physician of souls. A Moslem woman speaks to her from her bed and pleads, "Cheer me with your book." And a little boy asks eagerly, "What wonderful thing have you to show me today?" The enlarged staff hopes to carry the blessings of this service farther afield as itineracy becomes possible with a two-doctor staff.

The Hamlin Memorial Sanatorium

The spirits of Dr. Mary Eddy and Mrs. Hoskins live on in this work of education and mercy. The mission was fearful that with the passing away of Mrs. Hoskins, interest might flag in this great cause. The reverse has been the case. The Sanatorium has never been better and never as large as in the past year. One hundred patients can now be provided for, and the beds have been practically full all the time.

With the new Hoskins Solarium, made possible by the gift of the late Mrs. J. S. Kennedy, the Sanatorium is in a position to care for the patients in the most modern way. Constant use is made of the X-ray, the violet rays, the pneumothorax treatment, and other modern devices. One hundred twenty-one patients were admitted the past year, and, of the 103 discharged, seventy-two were declared cured or greatly improved.

One of the best results of this work has been its influence on the whole problem of tuberculosis work in Syria. The Syrian Anti-Tuberculosis Society is constantly growing in strength, and is building up a strong Sanatorium in another part of Mount Lebanon, all of its resources being from the people of the land.

The writer remembers the condition twenty-five years ago when, coming into Beirut by carriage at night, he heard a pistol shot and later learned that a man who had contracted the dread disease, being refused shelter at houses and hotels, had finally committed suicide in desperation. At that time families deliberately drove relatives from the house because of fear of the deadly dis-

ease. Much of that has now passed, and among the influences leading to the change, few would deny that our Sanatorium work has been the greatest.

The Ministry of the Printed Word

The Syria Mission is fortunate in being able to witness also through the printing press. For 108 years the Press, established at Malta by the first missionaries to the Near East, has carried on its work without interruption. A mere mention of some of its products and activities the past year will show its wide influence.

A Complete Concordance of the Arabic Bible, a Comprehensive Arabic-Arabic dictionary of 2,800 pages, a Bible dictionary in Persian, a book in the series of Grade Lessons in Christian Nurture for use in the Mission Schools, a booklet by Dr. W. S. Nelson called "A Soul's Queries," a tract on Temperance, two religious papers, one in Persian and the other in Arabic, two books on the new life of Moslem and Druze women by an educated Druze girl, over 500,000 volumes of Bibles and portions printed and sold during the past two years—these are but a partial list of the great service the Press is doing for the cause of preaching in all Arabic-speaking lands.

Thus in these various ministries the Syria Mission is attempting to witness for Christ in this Moslem land. The missionaries are conscious today of a new life and purpose. Their field is new and enlarged, as they look to the vast unoccupied fields to the north and east; to the startling speed with which the life of women is changing, and the need of guidance and a new spirit; to the growing materialism of the Moslem mind, supplanting even the spirit of Islamic faith, and raising the question whether the old faith is to be exchanged for agnosticism instead of Christ. The missionaries in Syria are feeling with thankful hearts that they have been called and prepared for such a time as this.

OBSERVED AND OVERHEARD IN MOSUL

BY J. W. WILLOUGHBY

[This letter from a hypothetical Presbyterian traveler uses fictitious names, and freely groups incidents together, but it is meant to be a general picture of the missionary impact on Islam in Iraq, particularly Mosul. Mr. Willoughby is engaged in evangelistic work in Mosul, Iraq (Mesopotamia).]

My dear Mr. and Mrs. Presbyterian: When you asked me to tell of what I saw of mission work while on this trip through the Near East, I did not realize that sightseeing would take so much time; I have not visited mission institutions so extensively as I had planned. I have also found difficult carrying out your excellent suggestion of getting local people to give their estimate of mission work. Many showed such deficiency in English that I could place little dependence on their remarks. Some persons praised the missionaries most highly—in fact, so volubly, that I must conclude that they were but telling me what they thought would please. On other occasions I found individuals, both

Moslems and Christians, decidedly hostile to mission work, declaring it unwise, and worse than useless.

Yesterday, however, I met a local Christian who seemed sound in judgment; at least, he could answer questions intelligently. He had been my guide over the city of Mosul and the ruins of Nineveh. I shall set down some observations which I thought significant, using the first person, as though he were speaking.

"I have heard of very few converts from Islam in Iraq; I know that there are some, but their numbers are as yet so few, that I am not ready to draw any conclusions as to missionary effectiveness. But I can illustrate Moslem opinion of missionaries by little incidents which occurred yesterday afternoon while you were going over the city.

"Once you stopped to take photographs of the big leaning minaret in a quarter where foreigners are seldom seen; a group of little Moslem girls was standing nearby. One conjectured that you were a missionary, and related at some length how a woman missionary (she guessed probably your wife) visited her aunt; the family had been astonished to learn that her husband never beat her; they were puzzled at some of the ways in which she cared for her infant daughter, and were surprised to see her take as much pride in her as if she had been a boy.

"Of course, sir, not all Mosul women are so ignorant, but the average is pitifully near to those girls. I regret that there are only two or three missionary ladies in the city, since there are so many thousands of unprivileged women whom they might influence.



Arabs (Moslems) of the "Egg Gate" District, Mosul, Iraq.

"Only a few minutes later we stopped again, while you were getting a photograph of a crowded corner of the bazaar. There I overheard a conversation, this time between two men, who also took you for a missionary. Ahmad surmised that you were one of those fellows who is trying to upset their religion. Ismail thought not, but that you were here mainly to help the Eastern Churches. 'Except for help from the foreigners, they would all have long ago become Moslems.' (The facts of history certainly disprove so sweeping a statement, although we Oriental Christians are grateful for the outside assistance which we do receive.) 'However,' asked Ahmad, 'is it not true that he pays a thousand rupees to any Moslem who will turn Christian?' 'Perhaps so,' said Ismail, 'I now recall that Mollah Saeed was forced to write religious pamphlets to answer some of the tracts which those missionaries scatter about.' From these remarks you will see that local Moslems may have very mistaken ideas of missionaries.

"Returning to the hotel, we passed a group of older boys. Some of them, visitors from Baghdad, are members of the new Young Men's Moslem Association, modelled on the Y. M. C. A., and initiated to compete with its Baghdad branch. That is a good sort of missionary agency; I wish we had one in Mosul. I saw in one boy's hand a temperance tract, which he had gotten from the mission book shop. He may be a member of the new Moslem League Against Alcoholism. I cannot guarantee that that organization began through any missionary influence, but I do know that the mission broadcasts considerable literature against drink, drugs, and vice.

"In my opinion, the outstanding missionary contribution to this country is the education of leaders. You may say that I am prejudiced because I myself graduated from a mission school; but I see doctors, teachers, business leaders, and high officials now filling important places, who have been many years under missionary teaching, and they have great force for good in civic life."

These incidents are significant, dear friends in America. It seems to me that if this United Mission in Mesopotamia, which is relatively so small and new, had a larger force, and more appropriations for work, we should see more definite as well as more extensive results.

Cordially yours,

JOHN SMITH

Price 5 cents

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